

## BIG FIVE TRAITS AS A PREDICTOR OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AMONG THE FRONTLINE HOTEL WORKERS

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### ABSTRACT

*Researchers have devoted sufficient time to explore various organizational and individual factors that influence employee behavior and consequently determine employee performance. Personality is one such variable which has been studied in great detail. The new addition to the researched variables is emotional intelligence. Researchers have been working to explore the influence that emotional intelligence has on human behavior and its links with employee performance. Personality and emotional intelligence have been studied together to assess the influence the two variables have on employee behavior. Most of these studies have been conducted in a western context. To bridge this research gap, the present study was conducted with the main aim to examine the link between big five personality traits (Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness). An attempt was made to ascertain the role of personality traits in determining emotional intelligence.*

*Data was collected from 240 frontline hotel workers in the Kashmir region out of which 150 were males (n=150) and 90 were females (n=90). The findings of the study are expected to be useful to the service sector, especially the hospitality sector.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Emotional Intelligence, Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness & Conscientiousness*

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### INTRODUCTION

Hospitality services are mostly consumed with a high level of interaction between employees and customers and in order to maintain a good customer base, customers must feel valued/satisfied in terms of behaviour of workers towards them (Kernbach & Schutte, 2005; Langhorn, 2004; Varca, 2004). Contemporary research states that to attain customer delight, employers need to be aware of the emotions of their employees so as to offer better products and services to customers at lower costs (Diffendorf and Richard 2003). Due to the profound impact of emotional management on the functioning of an organisation, emotional intelligence as a subject of research has attracted both practitioners and academicians (Cartwright & Pappas, 2008). Emotional intelligence is the capacity to utilise own emotions and emotions of others, the use of emotional information guides thinking and behaviour thus helping one in adjusting oneself to the environment (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Moreover, in order to fit into the competition its necessary to study the personality of an individual, personality being a dynamic organisation within an individual, determines an individual's characteristics and thoughts (Allport, 1961). An individual possesses a set of traits, behaviour and attributes which constitute personality. The five-factor model of personality comprises of behavioural, emotional, cognitive patterns which broadly covers the five major traits that define human personality

across cultures. Big five traits include Neuroticism (N), the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety and depression; Extraversion (E), the tendency to be sociable, warm, active, assertive, cheerful, and in search of stimulation; Openness to Experience (O), the tendency to be imaginative, creative, unconventional, emotionally and artistically sensitive; Agreeableness (A), the dimension of interpersonal relations, characterized by altruism, trust, modesty, and cooperativeness; and Conscientiousness (C), a tendency to be organized, strong-willed, persistent, reliable, and a follower of rules and ethical principles (McCrae & Terracciano, 2005, & Terracciano & McCrae, 2006). Researches suggest that emotional intelligence and personality are considered to be vital areas in order to achieve organisational goals and objectives (Beer & Nohria, 2000). The present study is an attempt to assess whether the big five traits i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, conscientiousness and neuroticism contribute to one's emotional intelligence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Emotional intelligence and personality traits are interlinked to each other as the type of personality is going to have an effect on the management of emotions. The relationship between the two variables has been widely researched using different measures. Bracket and Mayer (2003) in a study noted that emotional intelligence is highly correlated with neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion and conscientiousness and shows no correlation with openness with experience. Some previous studies have tested the linkage between the big five traits and emotional intelligence (see for example Matchimanon 2001 as cited in (Kant, 2014); Petride, 2010). Further, emotional intelligence is relevant to understanding and control of emotions which are very important in personality construction (Atta & Ather, 2013). The extant literature has reported stronger association of emotional intelligence with various personality traits e.g. extraversion (Davies, Stankov & Roberts, 1998; Petride, 2001; Vernon, Villani, Schermer, & Petrides, 2008; Siegling, Furnham, & Petrides, 2015) and neuroticism (Petride, 2001; Vernon et al., 2008), however, extraversion is positively and neuroticism is negatively related to personality (Matchimanon, 2011; Yusoff, Desa, Ibrahim, Ba, & Ab, 2014), studies have reported the indirect effect of extraversion and neuroticism with the mediating effect of emotional intelligence (Sajadaini, Kalantari, Abedi and Nilforooshan, 2017). Literature reports both direct and indirect impacts of extraversion on emotional intelligence. Similarly, neuroticism has been found to have a negative impact on emotional intelligence, therefore we assume that:

*H<sub>1</sub>: Extraversion has positive and significant impact on emotional intelligence*

*H<sub>2</sub>: Neuroticism has negative and significant impact on emotional intelligence*

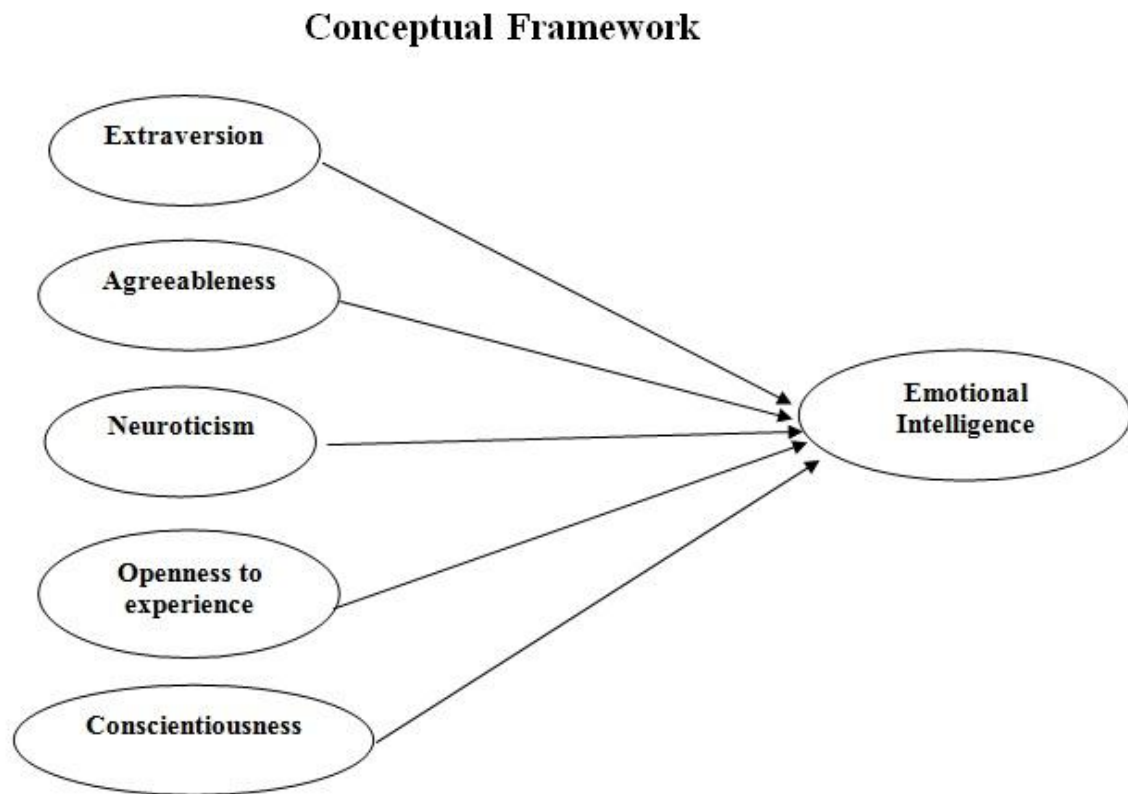
Some studies conducted on personality traits and emotional intelligence have reported contradictory findings reveal that neuroticism, agreeableness and extraversion are related to emotional intelligence (Davies et al, 1998 as cited in Van der Zee, Thijs, & Schakel, 2002). Vernon et al (2008) note that other factors of the big five such as conscientiousness, openness to experience and agreeableness have moderate association with emotional intelligence. Some studies claim that personality traits like extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively associated with emotional intelligence while as negatively correlated with neuroticism (Nawi, 2012; Saklofske, Austin, & Minski, 2003; Brackett & Mayer, 2003). Some studies see for example (Tok & Morali, 2009) have reported contradictory findings and report that the big five personality traits do not significantly predict emotional intelligence. Keeping in view the contradictions in earlier findings, the present study would like to retest the link between agreeableness, openness and conscientiousness. Therefore, we hypothesise that:

*H<sub>3</sub>: Agreeableness has positive and significant impact on emotional intelligence.*

*H4: Openness to experience has positive and significant impact on emotional intelligence.*

*H5: Conscientiousness has positive and significant on emotional intelligence*

### Conceptual Framework



### Objectives of the Study

The objective for the present study was to assess whether the big five traits i.e., Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, openness to experience and Extraversion are showing an effect on emotional intelligence.

- To assess levels of emotional intelligence across the employees in hotels
- To study the impact of the big five traits on emotional intelligence.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Participants

The participants for the present study were 240 frontline hotel workers which included front desk waiters, bell boys, housekeeping and floor managers. Most of the respondents were males (n=150,62.5%) and rest were females (n=90;37.5%).

The method of sampling used for the study was purposive convenience sampling in view of the category and location of hotels.

### Data Collection

Data was collected using a well-structured questionnaire and was distributed among 250 participants out of which 240

were found fit for analysis. The data was collected from hotel staff by seeking prior permission from hotel authorities. The human resource department was contacted for the purpose of approaching target samples.

## Measures

### Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS,2000)

Researchers like Fukuda, Saklofske, Tamoaka and Lim (2012) believe that WLEIS is based on Mayer and Salovey (1997) model. The scale consists of 16 item scale which was developed by Wong & Law (2002) in Hong Kong and is measured on 5-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree). The scale has been used in Chinese and English versions and the validity and reliability of the scale was tested which has been reported as adequate for the research purposes (Wong & Law, 2007). Other emotional Intelligence scales were criticised by Davies, Stankov and Robert (1998) as they were found to be highly correlated with the Big five personality dimensions while as emotional intelligence was found to be a distinct construct from the big five dimensions by Law, Wong & Song (2004).

### Big Five Inventory-10(2007)

The BFI-10 (Rammstedt & John, 2007) is an abbreviated version of the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991; John & Srivastava, 1999). The questionnaire consists of ten items measuring neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness and each was measured using two items. The BFI-10 was found to be adequate for the personality assessment (Rammstedt & John, 2007). The BFI was measured using five-point Likert scale (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree).

## Statistical Analyses

The data was analysed using SPSS version 20. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the personality traits and emotional intelligence of hotel staff who have had direct contact with customers. Correlation and hierarchical regression analysis were used to analyse and test the hypotheses.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### Reliability Analysis

**Table 1**

	<b>Cronbach</b>
Extraversion	.823
Neuroticism	.883
Agreeableness	.848
Openness to experience	.808
Conscientiousness	.842
Emotional Intelligence	.902

The reliability results for the present study were above the threshold of 0.70, therefore, reliability results for the present study were having high internal consistency.

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics**

		Percent	N
<b>Gender</b>	Male	62.5%	150
	Female	37.5%	90
<b>Age</b>	20-25 years	33.3%	80
	26-30 years	35.0%	84
	31-35 years	22.9%	55
	Above 40 years	8.8%	21
<b>Marital status</b>	Married	32.9%	79
	Unmarried	67.1%	161
<b>Experience</b>	Less than a year	24.2%	58
	2-5 years	50.7%	122
	Above 5 years	25.1%	60

The table reveals the demographic profile of the study population, the majority of the respondents were males compared to females and most of the respondents were of age 26-30 years and unmarried. The work experience was between 2-5 years for most of the respondents.

**Table 3: Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Extraversion	4.1	1.08
Agreeableness	3.9	1.03
Neuroticism	3.4	1.06
Openness	3.8	1.01
Conscientiousness	3.1	1.04
Emotional Intelligence	3.3	.847

Table 3 exhibits the descriptive statistics for the personality traits and emotional intelligence, as can be seen, extraversion (M=4.1; S. D=1.08) and agreeableness (M=3.9; S. D=1.03) are the dominant traits among the participants while as least dominant was conscientiousness (M=3.1; S. D=1.04). The respondents scored a moderate (M=3.3; S. D=.847) mean on *emotional intelligence*.

**Table 4: Correlation Analysis**

	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism	Openness	Conscientiousness	EI
<b>Emotional intelligence</b>	.567**	.587**	-.283**	.015	.053	1
<b>*p&lt;0.05; **p&lt;0.01</b>						

Table 4 shows the correlation analysis of big five traits with emotional intelligence and it shows that extraversion  $r(240)=.567; p=0.00$  and agreeableness  $r(240)=.587; p=.000$  are positively and significantly correlated with emotional intelligence while as neuroticism  $r(240)=-.283; p=.000$  shows negative significant correlation with emotional intelligence. Other dimensions like openness  $r(240)=.015; P=.143$  and conscientiousness  $r(240)=.053; p=.533$  show no significant relationship with emotional intelligence.

Table 5: Hierarchical Regression Analysis

	B	Standard error		R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup>
Model 1				.434	.434**
Constant	.887	.180			
Extraversion	.336	.055	.354**		
Agreeableness	.392	.057	.397**		
Model 2				.447	.013*
Constant	1.333	.292			
Extraversion	.334	.055	.352**		
Agreeableness	.358	.059	.363**		
Neuroticism	-.103	.043	-.122*		
Openness	.007	.051	.007		
Model 3				.448	.001
Constant	1.232	.331			
Extraversion	.340	.056	.358**		
Agreeableness	.355	.059	.360**		
Neuroticism	-.105	.043	-.125*		
Openness	.035	.053	.032		
Conscientiousness	.003	.051	.003		
** P<0.01;; *P<0.05					

Table 5 presents regression estimates for big five traits of personality (extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness and conscientiousness) on emotional intelligence. In model 1, R<sup>2</sup> is .43 which means extraversion and agreeableness explain 43% of the variance in emotional intelligence with F(2,237)=90.78, P<0.01. The results reveal that extraversion ( =.354; p<0.01) and agreeableness ( =.397; p<0.01) do contribute positively towards emotional intelligence. Hence **H<sub>1</sub>** and **H<sub>2</sub>** are supported.

In model 2 R<sup>2</sup> value was .447 i.e. 44% of the variance in emotional intelligence with F (4,235)=47.5; p<0.01 was explained when we added neuroticism and openness to experience which means that these two traits are not that strong predictors of emotional intelligence. As can be seen from the table neuroticism ( =-.122; p<0.01) has negative and significant association with emotional intelligence, thus **H<sub>3</sub>** is accepted. Moreover, openness to experience does not significantly influence emotional intelligence, therefore, **H<sub>4</sub>** is not supported.

In model 3 R<sup>2</sup> value was .448 i.e., 44% which means an insignificant variance when we added one more trait i.e., it contributes negligibly to emotional intelligence. Similarly, the variance explained by conscientiousness is insignificant, therefore **H<sub>5</sub>** is not supported.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main aim of the study was to find the impact of the big five traits of personality i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, openness to experience and conscientiousness have on emotional intelligence. The results indicate that extraversion and agreeableness have positive and significant impact on emotional intelligence, in other words, we can say they were the main predictors of emotional intelligence. Openness to experience and conscientiousness are among the least dominant predictors of emotional intelligence. On the other hand, it was found that neuroticism had a negative impact on emotional intelligence, which means that if a person is into neuroticism, he/she would be emotionally less intelligent. The present study was conducted to test the relationship between emotional intelligence and personality traits and it was found that emotional intelligence has strong positive correlation with agreeableness and extraversion while as weak positive correlation with openness to experience and conscientiousness. The study reveals that an emotionally intelligent person will

experience low negative emotions. The results are in line with the findings of Mathews et al (2006) that also reported similar results. Some other studies that support the findings of the present study include (Hudani, Redzuan, & Hamsan, 2012; McCrae, 2000; Taksic & Mohric, 2006), these studies have also found that emotional intelligence is related to personality traits i.e., extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness. The findings of previous and the present study indicate that emotional intelligence training could be introduced in the service sector in general and hospitality organisations in particular, which is expected to help the development of strong emotions among employees while dealing with customers (Slaski and Catwright, 2002). The findings also suggest that among the personality traits extraversion and agreeableness could be assessed during the process of hiring new employees (Kim, Shin & Umbreit, 2007).

## LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The study has certain limitations like data was collected through self-report measures, where a researcher mostly faces the issue of response bias. The results of the study cannot be generalised as the sample size was small. A large sample being a true representative of the population could have been a better approach. Another issue could be the nature of the study which is cross sectional in nature, therefore, in the future attempts can be made to replicate studies using longitudinal studies.

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